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ABSTRACT

A growing number of educational programs seek to promote young people's participation in political and civic affairs. A common strategy for doing so is to provide students with opportunities to make a difference in their communities. Much research demonstrates a strong connection between a person's sense about making a difference efficacy and the level of participation. Ten nationally recognized programs that engaged students in community-based experiences and aimed to develop students' civic and political commitments were studied for over two years. By drawing on observations, interviews, and pre/post surveys that focused on changes in attitudes related to civic participation, the study was able to contextualize students' sense of efficacy as civic actors and its relation to program goals. This paper explores two common assumptions about developing a sense of civic and political efficacy: (1) when students' sense of efficacy grows, their commitment to future civic involvement grows as well; and (2) conversely, when students become frustrated or come to believe that problems are intractable, their commitment appears to decline (data supported these suppositions). Evidence presented indicated that complex questions surround the desirability of structuring curriculum to promote students' sense of their political and civic efficacy. The findings indicate that opportunities for civic and political efficacy can support the development of stronger commitments; but opportunities for students to learn about and experience the barriers and constraints they and other civic actors face are also important. The paper suggests ways programs might navigate dilemmas faced by practitioners who seek to structure experiences so students can gain a sense of efficacy on one hand, and an understanding of serious obstacles to democratic social change on the other. (Contains 8 notes, 3 tables, and 28 references.) (Author/BT)

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The Limits of Efficacy: Educating Citizens for a Democratic Society

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THE LIMITS OF EFFICACY

Abstract

A growing number of educational programs seek to promote young people's participation in political and civic affairs. A common strategy for doing so is to provide students with opportunities to make a difference in their communities. Indeed, much research demonstrates a strong connection between an individual's sense that they can make a difference – their sense of efficacy – and their level of participation.

Does a curricular emphasis on opportunities for civic and political efficacy make sense? Over two years, we studied ten nationally recognized programs that engaged students in community-based experiences and aimed to develop students' civic and political commitments. By drawing on observations, interviews, and pre/post surveys that focus on changes in attitudes related to civic participation, we were able to contextualize students' sense of efficacy as civic actors and its relation to program goals.

In this paper we explore two common assumptions about developing a sense of civic and political efficacy that we found to have substantial merit: first, that when students' sense of efficacy grows, their commitment to future civic involvement grows as well; second and conversely, that when students become frustrated or come to believe that problems are intractable, their commitment appears to decline. Our data supported these suppositions. However, the conclusions to draw from such findings are not as straightforward as they may seem. The evidence presented in this paper indicate that complex questions surround the desirability of structuring curriculum so as to promote students' sense of their political and civic efficacy.

Our study indicates that opportunities for civic and political efficacy can support the development of stronger commitments, but that opportunities for students to learn about and experience the barriers and constraints they and other civic actors face are also important. Not only may such opportunities prepare students for some of the frustrations they will likely face in future civic participation, but they can help students learn about the ways power structures, interest group influences, and technical challenges can constrain the effectiveness of both individuals and groups. Indeed, if "structuring projects for success" obscures these barriers and constraints, we worry that such curriculum may be mis-educative. We conclude by suggesting ways programs might navigate the dilemmas faced by practitioners who seek to structure experiences so that students gain a sense of efficacy, on the one hand, and an understanding of serious obstacles to democratic social change on the other.

The Limits of Efficacy: Educating Active Citizens for a Democratic Society

Justin, a teenager from a West Coast City, delivered the following harsh indictment when we asked him about the semester he spent working to improve his community: "You can try and change things, but basically it will just make you feel bad for trying. They didn't even want to hear what I was saying. They don't care."

Unfortunately, more and more youth today are coming to the same conclusion. Indeed, a national survey of youth ages 15 to 24 revealed that 57% agree with the strong statement that, "you can't trust politicians because most are dishonest." Two-thirds of all young people agreed that, "our generation has an important voice, but no one seems to hear it." Moreover, those youth who were least trusting were also the least likely to vote, to believe that government can affect their lives, or to pay attention to politics (see National Association of Secretaries of State, 1999).

What makes this statement and similar findings even more alarming is that they reflect data indicating a long-term decline in young people's political engagement. For example, while 50 percent of 18 to 24 year-olds exercised their right to vote in 1972, only 32 percent did in 2000. Similarly, a recent survey of college freshmen (Sax et al, 1999) found that interest in social activism is declining. Only 35.8% felt it "very important" or "essential" to "influence social values" (its lowest point since 1986) and students' desire to participate in community action programs fell to 21.3% (its lowest point in over a decade).

In response to these trends, a growing number of educators and policy makers are looking for ways to promote young people's participation in political and civic affairs. A common

strategy for doing so is to provide youth with opportunities to make a difference in their communities. Indeed, much research demonstrates a strong connection between an individual's sense that they can make a difference – their sense of efficacy – and their level of civic participation[1]. As Almond and Verba write in *The Civic Culture*, their 1963 landmark study:

> [T]he belief in one's competence is a key political attitude. The self-confident citizen appears to be the democratic citizen. Not only does he [sic] think he can participate, he thinks others ought to participate as well. Furthermore, he does not merely think he can take part in politics; he is likely to be more active." (p. 257).

Similarly, Conway found that those with high levels of political efficacy are 20 to 30 percent more likely to vote than those with low levels of efficacy and similar relationships have been found to other forms of civic participation (in Berman, 1997, 44; also see, Niemi and Associates, 1974 and National Association of Secretaries of State, 1999).

The connection between efficacy and civic engagement, however, is complex. Scholars, for example, draw a significant distinction between internal and external political efficacy (Balch, 1974). *Internal political efficacy* refers to a person's sense of his or her own ability to participate effectively in the political process. People with high degrees of internal political efficacy believe they are capable when it comes to civic affairs. Measures of *external political efficacy*, on the other hand, reflect perceptions of governmental and institutional responsiveness to citizens' needs and demands.

Although findings are not uniform, internal political efficacy has generally been found to have a positive relationship to political activity and the closer the alignment of a specified measure of efficacy to the form of activity, the stronger the relationship (Wollman and Stouder,

[1] We adopt a relatively traditional conception of efficacy in political and civic endeavors: the belief that what you or those in the community do can bring positive change (see Bandura, 1977).

1991). Measures of external efficacy, on the other hand, have not exhibited a consistent relationship to activity. Indeed, Shingles (1981) and others have found high internal political efficacy and low external political efficacy prompted political activity among African Americans (see also Ennis and Schrener, 1987; Harris, 1999). Feeling both personal competence *and* that government is not responsive to the needs of African American citizens prompted many African Americans to participate in political affairs (often through activities such as litigation and protest) to bring about more just laws and increased government awareness and action.

What might these relationships imply for educators and those creating curriculum? Given what we know about the relationship between internal and external political efficacy and civic participation, does a curricular emphasis on opportunities for students to develop a sense of efficacy make sense? Should program leaders structure their programs so that students always have successful civic experiences?

Over two years, we studied ten nationally recognized programs that engaged students in community-based experiences and aimed to develop students' civic and political commitments. By drawing on observations, interviews, and pre/post surveys that focus on changes in attitudes related to civic participation, we were able to consider both the benefits and the potentially problematic consequences of a curricular emphasis on efficacy in relation to civic and political engagement. To illustrate our findings, we focus on two of the programs – both of which worked with high school seniors in their social studies classes. Data collected in one of the programs indicated that students experienced a great deal of both internal and external efficacy and that their commitment to participation expanded as well. In the second program, the reverse occurred. Students became frustrated by their inability to bring about change and, like Justin, the

West Coast teenager, their interest in future involvement declined. They also became critical of the broader society.

The Challenge for Educators

Based on this data, one might expect that we concur with educators who advocate providing students with opportunities for efficacy. The strong relationship that social scientists have identified between young people's sense that they are competent civic actors and their desire to participate seems to provide a clear rationale for such experiences. Intuitively, this relationship also makes sense. If students are rewarded through their civic participation, they will be more inclined toward political participation in the future. The logic of this thinking seems reasonable, and, in many respects, the data from our study support these conclusions. In discussing the implications of our findings, however, we argue that interpretations of such findings are not as straightforward as they may seem. Indeed, we argue that while efficacious experiences (particularly those that seek to promote internal political efficacy) can support the development of stronger commitments and may often be desirable, that opportunities for students to learn about and experience the barriers and constraints they and other civic actors frequently face can also be important. Not only may exposure to these constraints prepare students for some of the frustrations they will likely face in future civic participation, but it can also help students learn about the ways power structures, interest group influences, and technical challenges can hamper the effectiveness of both individuals and groups. In fact, if "structuring projects for success" obscures these barriers and constraints, we worry that such curriculum may be mis-educative – reinforcing the conservative political assumption that if individual citizens would just help out where help is needed, that these acts of kindness and charity (multiplied

across a citizenry) will transform society and offer redress for complex social problems. This approach may also promote a false sense of efficacy by obscuring real world complexities, power structures, and other barriers to change – meaningful and controversial social realities that many educators agree should be a central focus of study for schooling in a democracy (Noddings, 1999; Oakes et al., 2000; Wood, 1992).

Thus, educators face the potential conundrum: How to create curriculum that helps students make informed judgments regarding barriers that must be faced for meaningful change to occur without undermining students' sense of internal political efficacy? Drawing on examples from our study, we conclude by discussing several curricular strategies.

Methods

Sample

This paper focuses on data from two of the ten programs studied as part of the Surdna Foundation's Democratic Values Initiative. "Madison County Youth In Public Service" was located in a suburban/rural East Coast community outside a city of roughly 23,000 people. Two teachers were involved in this project, one from each of the county's high schools. Each year, the teachers worked with one of their government classes. Over two years, four classes participated. Students needed to request to participate in this version of the 12th grade government class, and teachers characterized participants in both schools as slightly better than average in terms of academic background. Students who enrolled in the Advanced Placement government course could not participate. More girls (59 percent) than boys (41 percent) participated. Although we were not able to collect reports on students' ethnicity, teachers

characterized the student population as almost entirely European American (with a few recent immigrants). An estimated three percent of the schools' students are persons of color.

"Bayside Students For Justice" was a curriculum developed as part of a 12th grade Social Studies course for students in a comprehensive urban high school on the West Coast. During the first year, a total of 67 students took part in the program. The group tested roughly at national norms and was relatively low-income with 40 percent living in public housing (data provided by the instructor).

Procedures

We collected four forms of data: observations, interviews, surveys, and documents prepared by program staff. Each year, our observations took place over a two to three day period in classrooms and at service sites. In some instances we were also able to observe formal public presentations by the participating students. These observations took place during the spring semester. Over the two years of the study, we interviewed 59 students from "Madison County" (in groups of 3 or 4) and 27 students from "Bayside" (either individually or in groups of 2 to 3). We also interviewed at least three staff members for each program towards the end (April or May) of each year. Several staff members were also interviewed at the beginning of the first year. Interviews lasted between 20 and 45 minutes and all interviews were both taped and transcribed. Finally, we conducted pre and post surveys of all participating students in September and June. In the case of Madison County Youth In Public Service, we studied the same program for two years. During the second year, we also were able to administer pre and post surveys to two control classrooms. These classrooms were also twelfth grade government classrooms, served students of similar academic ability, and were taught by the same two

teachers. Bayside's program changed significantly after the first year of operation, and we discuss year two briefly later in this paper.[2] An appropriate control classroom was not available in the case of Bayside, and we therefore rely on changes in the pre/post survey data and on our observations and interviews of students and staff. To receive feedback and as a check on our interpretations, we shared analysis on both quantitative and qualitative findings with those who ran the programs.

Measures and Analysis

Survey items were selected in an effort to assess varied outcomes commonly associated with civic priorities. We employed measures of students' commitment to community involvement, personal responsibility to help others, desire to volunteer, desire to work for justice, interest in politics, and commitment to following the news.[3]. We also employed several scales to assess varied outcomes related to students' sense of efficacy. These included measures of civic efficacy, leadership efficacy, and their sense of their knowledge or social capital for community development. These measures emphasized internal efficacy. The measure of civic efficacy, for example, asked whether students felt that, "I personally can make a difference in my community." Similarly, the measure of leadership efficacy assessed students' sense of their leadership effectiveness with questions such as, "once I know what needs to be done, I am good at planning how to do it." The measure of social capital for community development assessed their sense of their own knowledge and ability to promote community development. It asked, for

[2] For a detailed discussion of the second year experience and findings see Westheimer and Kahne, 2002.

[3] Measures of commitment to community involvement, personal responsibility, volunteering, and vision, are adapted from the National Learning Through Service Survey developed by the Search Institute. Some of these measures, in turn were adapted from instruments developed by Conrad and Hedin. See Instruments and Scoring Guide of the Experiential Education Evaluation Project (St. Paul: Center for Youth Development and Research, University of Minnesota, 1981). Items related to Social Capital and Leadership Efficacy draw on a Leadership

example, if students feel they "know how to contact and work effectively with organizations in my community such as schools, businesses, and social service organizations." We did not employ survey measures of external civic efficacy. External efficacy, however, received extensive attention in our focus group interviews. We conducted confirmatory factor analyses to verify that the items in each scale loaded on a single factor. We also computed a Cronbach Alpha for each scale to assess the internal consistency reliability. As detailed in tables 2 and 3, Alphas for all but two of the scales were greater than 0.6.

Our interviews and observations complement the surveys. Specifically, student and faculty interviews focused on students' beliefs regarding citizenship and on ways features of the curriculum may have affected those perspectives. We asked: What does it mean to you to be a good citizen? Did the program affect that vision? What people or experiences have influenced your behaviors and beliefs?

We also asked participants to identify and discuss particular social issues that are important to them and to community members. We encouraged them to describe their perspective on the nature of these problems, their causes, and possible ways of responding. Next we asked participants to describe any ways their participation in the given program might have altered their attitudes, knowledge, or skills in relation to either particular civic issues or their perspectives on responsible and effective citizenship. These questions drew out student beliefs regarding their internal and external efficacy. They spoke for example, about their sense of competence in civic affairs and about their confidence that they could or could not have an impact. We also asked them directly if they thought that government and other important social institutions were or

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measure developed for the Community Service Leadership Workshop. Contact Jim Seiber, Issaquah School District 411, Issaquah, WA 98027. For a complete list of items, please contact the authors.

were not responsive to the social issues about which they cared and about the experiences that shaped these beliefs.

Our observations took place in classrooms and at service sites. These observations (of at least 4 classroom sessions of each program each year) helped us understand and illustrate program practices. In some instances we were also able to observe formal public presentations by the participating students. Though we are hesitant to generalize from a small number of observations, they were a helpful check on interpretations of interviews and surveys and we sometimes drew on these observations during interviews.

We analyzed this data in conjunction with our statistical analysis of survey results. We found that the interviews enriched, explained, and allowed us to corroborate our interpretation of survey results. The interviews and observations also deepened our understanding of and ability to articulate the meaning of responses to survey items and provided us with insight regarding particular findings. In the case of observations and interviews, the process of data collection and data analysis was recursive, cycling "between thinking about the existing data and generating strategies for collecting new–often better quality–data" (Miles and Huberman, 1984).

The analysis occurred throughout data collection as well as after data collection was complete and followed the process described by Strauss (1990) as the constant comparative method. This iterative process occurred through reflective and analytical memos between the researchers as well as the ongoing coding of field notes. In particular, we analyzed the interviews for recurring themes and patterns regarding student and teacher perceptions of how participation had affected students' beliefs regarding citizenship and democratic values. We also asked teachers to reflect on our observations not only to test the accuracy of statements but also to re-examine perceptions and conclusions, drawing on their insider knowledge.

The following descriptions were captured from field notes and audiotapes. The quotations are verbatim. Names of schools, students, teachers, and geographical references are pseudonyms.

Findings Part I: Opportunities for Efficacy are Often Desirable

In this section we explore two common assumptions: first, that when students' sense of efficacy grows, their commitment to future civic involvement grows as well; second and conversely, that when students become frustrated or come to believe that problems are intractable, their commitment often declines. We found both of these suppositions to carry significant weight. As we will explore in the following section, however, the conclusions to draw from such findings are not as straightforward as they may seem. But first, we describe data from two programs we studied that support both of these propositions.

Madison County Youth In Public Service

The story of Madison County Youth in Public Service demonstrates the ways an emerging sense of internal and external efficacy can contribute to students' civic commitments. As part of a high school government course, the Youth in Public Service curriculum first engaged students in intensive study of the traditional government curriculum content over the course of a semester. During the second semester, students worked in small groups with various government agencies and programs on community-based projects. These internships required that small groups of students work on public service projects in their county's administrative offices. One group studied the feasibility of curbside recycling. They conducted phone interviews of 150 residents, undertook a cost analysis, and examined maps of the city's population density to determine which parts of the city should be served in this way. These students examined charts of

projected housing growth to estimate growth in trash and its cost and environmental implications. Another group identified jobs that prisoners incarcerated for less than 90 days could perform and analyzed the cost and efficacy of similar programs in other localities. Other students helped to develop a five-year plan for the fire and rescue department. Another group examined ways cellular telephone service providers might share communications towers.

In all of these projects, students were responsible for interacting with government agencies, writing reports, and presenting findings. Each project required that students conduct research in order to fully understand the issues. There was latitude within each project for students to define their specific civic concern. The students' considerable successes, however, were aided by a great deal of administrative footwork beforehand. For each of the projects, the school district's Instructional Supervisor coordinated contacts at the appropriate government agencies, worked with those agencies to structure appropriate and engaging projects, and found liaisons that were excited about working with students. Madison County Youth in Public Service was designed so that students succeeded in what they set out to do.

And succeed they did. The group of students organizing the recycling drive wrote an editorial based on their analysis that was published in their local newspaper. The group studying a plan to reduce the number of cellular telephone towers wrote a detailed analysis of the legal requirements of such towers and presented their findings to the Board of Supervisors highlighting issues of which many were unaware and, ultimately, influencing policy. Making the case for improved funding for the fire and rescue department, one group of students calculated the number of minutes it would take for fire trucks to reach the widely disparate elementary schools in their rural district. Their calculations were publicized and the community responded with interest.

Consistently, when discussing their experiences in this program, students expressed significant satisfaction with all they had accomplished and with the recognition they received for these accomplishments. As one student explained, "I thought it was just going to be another project. You know, we do some research, it gets written down and we leave and it gets put on the shelf somewhere. But, ... this [curbside recycling] is going to be a real thing.... It's really going to happen." A different student told us, "I didn't realize this was going to be as big as what it is. I mean, we've been in the newspaper...four times." And another student reported:

> I didn't expect it to have such an impact. I thought it would be one of those classes where we all talk about it and...they'd nod and smile [but] we really had an effect on what is happening. And we're learning a lot more than I thought we would, because if you just take the standard government classes, you're just going to learn about government. Now you're learning about government and how to deal with people and how to collect information.

Indeed, the program provided numerous opportunities for students to learn skills and to be exposed to information that, in addition to their accomplishments, enhanced their sense of both internal and external efficacy. For example, when high school students needed to make their presentation to their County's Board of Supervisors, each group worked with their teacher and with their field site supervisor to plan their presentation. They got tips on how to make their brief presentations interesting, on how to generate visual aids with computer software, and on how to insure that their primary message was communicated.

Perhaps most importantly from the standpoint of civic involvement, students linked their sense of efficacy (stemming from their emerging sense of capacity and from the impact of their work) to their desire for continued civic participation. For example, Eddie noted, "I didn't realize we had as much influence as we did. One person can really make a change in the

community." When we asked him whether this changed the way he thought about being a citizen, he replied that, after the experience with local government agencies, he thought that

> [All citizens] have a responsibility to voice their opinion by either writing letters or talk[ing] to people who control the county government, or state and federal government. Just let them know what you think about something that they're trying out. Maybe give new opinions or new ideas that you think would help.

Other students expressed similar satisfaction from what they accomplished as well as commitments to remain engaged in civic affairs in the future.

Our quantitative data was consistent with what we heard during interviews and saw during site visits. Specifically, as detailed in Table 1, there were statistically significant ($p<.05$) changes in pre- post- Likert scale scores on several of our measures. In fact, we found a significant increase in all three measures related to efficacy: civic efficacy, leadership efficacy and students' sense that they had the knowledge and social capital needed to effectively promote community development. These gains were matched by increases in reports of personal responsibility to help others, following the news, and vision of how to help others, and a marginally significant ($p<.06$) commitment to community involvement.

The robust nature of these results became even clearer during the second year of our study because a control group was also surveyed. This group had similar academic skills and was taught by the same two teachers. This control group did not show statistically significant changes on any of the items we measured.

To summarize: the developers of the Madison County Youth in Public Service program structured their program to provide efficacious experiences working with government agencies. They wanted students to succeed in their community activities and thereby to develop confidence

that they could be effective civic actors. They structured the curriculum and the students' experiences in the community accordingly. Both qualitative and quantitative data indicate that their efforts paid off. The students gained a sense that they "made a difference" – that they were capable leaders and change agents in their communities. Moreover, they reported that they were more inclined to engage in civic affairs in the future.

Bayside Students for Justice

Bayside Students for Justice provides an interesting contrast to the Youth in Public Service program. The Bayside Students for Justice program, part of a district wide collaborative effort, was created by the teachers at Woodrow Wilson High School.[4] One class enrolled "Academy" students who are "at risk" of dropping out while another worked with students preparing for advanced placement (AP) exams. The Academy classes are populated primarily but not exclusively by minority students while the AP classes enroll mostly but not exclusively white and Asian students. Students chose their own projects based on discussions in class, readings, and research about problems facing their communities. One group of students investigated the lack of access to adequate health care for women and sought to get the city Board of Supervisors to allocate funds to erect a new women's health center in an under-served area. Another group sought to challenge a State Senate bill that could put students and their parents in jail for truancy and try juveniles as adults for certain crimes. Other groups investigated child labor practices and bias in standardized testing. In addition to work in the community, students also participated in three "summits" where they publicly presented both their projects and what they accomplished.

[4] All the classes used the Active Citizenship Today materials developed by the Constitutional Rights Foundation and the Close-Up Foundation.

Students' experiences working on these community-based activities were uneven. Some students were engaged in in-depth projects that were powerful; others were engaged in projects that were badly thwarted. Their problems stemmed from two related dynamics. First, none of the government, school, and community agencies was prepared beforehand to expect contact from the students. Consequently, when students sought to investigate issues they frequently were turned away, ignored, or, in the students' words "not taken seriously." In addition – and more importantly for our purposes here – the projects students pursued challenged the status quo. *While students in Madison County worked <u>with</u> city officials on projects, those at Bayside criticized and sought to change various governmental and educational policies and programs.* Not surprisingly, they encountered resistance.

Both qualitative and quantitative data regarding the students' frustrating experiences indicate that these experiences decreased their commitment to future civic involvement. In interviews, students reported high levels of frustration and a growing sense of hopelessness. They expressed low levels of both internal and external efficacy related to community improvement and questioned whether it is their responsibility to try. One student recalled her frustration this way:

> We were trying to get anyone to listen to us but never got all the way through because we kept running into all this red tape that said "no you can't do that" [or] "Oh, you want to do that, well you'll have to go to that office over there." [We] kind of got the impression that nobody really wanted to do anything about it.

This sense of frustration was widespread. In response to other interview and in-class reflection questions such as "What did you learn from these activities?" other students answered

"If you go out into the community and try to do good, someone will pull you down," "Basically, they were wasting our time and theirs too," and "it's hard to get anyone to listen to you."

In most cases, the survey results, as shown in Table 2, were consistent with the interview data, reflecting the frustration students experienced in connection with their community-based activities. With a few important exceptions (which we will discuss in the next section), virtually all measures of students' orientation towards civic participation and community engagement declined. Their sense of personal responsibility to help others declined and they were marginally ($p=0.1$) less likely to express a commitment to community involvement or a desire to work for social justice. Two measures related to efficacy (measures of civic efficacy and of students' sense of their knowledge related to community development) showed no change and the measure of leadership efficacy declined significantly. Most notably, students reported a sizable (-.50) and statistically significant ($p < .01$) decline when asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement, "I want to become an effective leader in my community." These declines occurred despite thorough and carefully developed classroom curriculum in which teachers hoped students would emerge ready to work to improve society as active leaders and citizens.

Thus, while efficacious experiences promoted civic commitment among Madison County Students, the reverse occurred at Bayside. The commonly assumed connections between the successful or unsuccessful nature of student experiences working in the community, their self-confidence as agents of change, and the impact on students' commitment to future civic involvement were supported by our study.

Findings Part II: The Limits of Efficacy as a Curricular Goal

So far, these findings seem unremarkable. Given that Madison County's approach promoted civic commitments and Bayside's program did not, educators might be tempted to promote the Madison County approach over that employed at Bayside. Similarly, policymakers might be tempted to support civic education that provides students with the sense that they can make a difference as a means of promoting young people's political engagement. We would argue, however, that the choice between these two programs or approaches is not straightforward. While giving students a chance to "make a difference" clearly may have benefits, this approach may also have costs. Our perspective on the issues can be clarified by considering the difference between internal and external efficacy and by revisiting attention to the two programs we have already discussed.

Specifically, it is important to consider the difference between internal and external political efficacy as educational aims. In many cases, it seems reasonable, for example, to structure curriculum to promote students' sense of internal efficacy – their sense of personal competence. As discussed earlier, the literature indicates that higher internal efficacy is related to active engagement. This goal might be pursued by developing that competence and by engaging students in efforts where a sense of success is possible.

Structuring curriculum so as to promote students' sense of external efficacy, however, may be problematic. Political scientists use self-reported measures of feelings of external political efficacy to capture differences across various population groups. African-Americans and Latinos, for example, tend to have a lower sense of political efficacy than do their white counterparts (see Niemi and Junn, 1998; Abramson, 1983). Such results likely reflect the fact that government and community institutions are less responsive to African-Americans than to Whites. These lower measures of external efficacy thus reflect a reality. The appropriate

response, therefore, is to increase government responsiveness – not to try and convince a disempowered group that mainstream institutions want to respond to their concerns. To do otherwise is to alter *indicators* of a healthy democracy without challenging the underlying ills[5].

What makes attention to broad notions of efficacy as a goal particularly complex, therefore, is that curricular strategies that deal sensibly with external efficacy may not promote internal efficacy. Conversely, attending primarily to internal efficacy may not help students consider issues related to external efficacy.

Our two cases illustrate these dynamics. The Bayside program, for example, engaged high stakes problems that students found difficult to solve. While many school-based programs might have students clean up a nearby park or collect clothing or food for a local charity, the Bayside students were engaged in ambitious projects that sought to expose structural injustices, sometimes forgoing more typical and bounded projects that do less to challenge existing power structures. Whether to support a publicly-funded health care center for women or how to investigate bias in standardized tests, for example, are controversial and unresolved social policy questions.

Naturally, these projects were more likely to meet with opposition than less ambitious projects. As a result, students reported doubts about their ability to effect change in social institutions such as better attention to women's health care. As we already detailed, this appears to have lessened their desire to participate in political and civic endeavors. At the same time, however, that these experiences may have diminished students' sense of internal efficacy and

[5] Highlighting a similar set of issues, Thomas (1970) identified a conservative bias in measures of personal efficacy. He found that those holding a conservative political ideology were more likely to express personal efficacy than those holding liberal beliefs. Since these judgments may reflect reasonable interpretations of lived experience, he argued that it therefore makes no more sense to try and convince liberals that they should have more efficacy than it does to convince conservatives that they should have less.

thus undermined their commitment to civic action, they also appear to have sparked valuable insights related to questions of external efficacy. Kira reported, for example:

> I think it's really hard to get things done that count for anything. I mean we can pick up litter all day long and get something done [that is temporary], but to try and get them to build a women's health center in our community, that's a tough task and no one wants to do it.

In interviews and in class, students expressed an often-realistic assessment of how difficult it is to accomplish meaningful and, at times, controversial tasks. And, interviews and observations reveal that students were deeply engaged in these activities and that most took them very seriously. For example, another student, Tony, observed that

> "We really had no clue that so many people would be *against* a [publicly funded] health center, but when we started to see where people stood on this, it seemed like, well those who wouldn't get 'nothing from it, they were the ones who didn't want it."

When asked what it would take to get a women's health center built, Kira responded, "You'd have to change a lot of people's minds about stuff and organize.... You'd have to fight for it."

Further analysis of the survey data reveals important distinctions as well. For example, the scale measuring interest in politics showed no change. However, if we consider three of its items (see Table 3), we find movement in opposing directions. Two items related to political action ("interest in voting" and "interest in working on a campaign") showed statistically significant declines of 0.38 and 0.31 respectively. At the same time, students reported a dramatic (+1.00) and statistically significant ($p<.01$) increase in "talking about politics and political issues". In fact, this was the largest pre/post change of any item across all the programs we

studied. Thus the curriculum appears to have diminished students' sense of internal efficacy and, as a result, to have diminished their interest in related political activity – but not their overall interest in politics, specifically politically charged concerns and debates.

The Madison County Youth in Public Service curriculum offers lessons in this regard as well. While both qualitative and quantitative data indicate that these students showed impressive gains in their sense of internal efficacy, neither their interest in political discussion nor their intention to engage in explicitly political activity changed (see Table 1). More generally, we did not find evidence in student interviews, our observations, or our analysis of survey data that student projects and associated analysis examined ideological and political issues related to interest groups and the political process, the causes of poverty, different groups' access to health care, or the fairness of different systems of taxation (even though two projects focused on issues related to health care and taxation). Students focused on particular programs and policies and aimed for technocratic/value neutral analysis. Accordingly, neither survey data nor interview data indicated changes in our measures of these students' knowledge of or interest in structural dynamics, collective or root causes of social problems, or political participation (see Westheimer and Kahne, 2002 for details).

In short, the Madison County curriculum appears to have fostered internal efficacy as well as civic commitments, but the manner in which this was achieved appears to have avoided attention to structural issues and political dynamics – foci that might have diminished students' sense of internal efficacy, but that are essential to informed and effective efforts to promote democratic citizenship and democratic social change.

A Widespread Trend?

What's particularly troubling about this dynamic is that educators often are making this choice – emphasizing curricular strategies that develop internal efficacy but that obscure the importance of politics, social critique, and collective pursuit of systemic change (Robinson, 2000; Westheimer and Kahne, 2000; Barber, 1992). Data HUD collected on 599 college service-learning programs, for example, revealed that 50% were direct service (tutoring, serving food, clothes collections, blood drives), 42% provided technical assistance such as leadership classes and computer training, 7% emphasized physical revitalization such as tree planting and housing renovation, and only 1% were for political advocacy such as drafting legislation or building tenant councils (in Robinson, 2000, p. 145). In addition, surveys of young people indicate movement in exactly this direction. As noted earlier in this paper, a recent survey of college freshmen (Sax et al, 1999) found that students' interest in social activism is declining while their volunteer activities are reaching new highs. Similarly, a study commissioned by the National Association of Secretaries of State (1999) found that less than 32 percent of eligible voters between the ages of 18 and 24 voted in the 1996 presidential election (in 1972, the comparable number was 50 percent), but that a whopping 94 percent of those aged 15-24 believed that "the most important thing I can do as a citizen is to help others." In a very real sense, youth seem to be "learning" that citizenship does not require government, politics, or social action.

Tobi Walker, drawing on her teaching experiences with service learning at Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics, labels this phenomenon a "service/politics split" (2000). She describes the disposition of the students she has worked with this way:

> [M] ost of them were filled with disgust, disillusionment, and even dread toward politics. They wanted to "make a difference" and they believed that the best way to do that was by

> helping another person one-on-one…[C]hallenging decision-making structures…rarely entered their thinking.

Walker goes on to note that students involved in non-controversial activities that allow young people to "'get things done' and immediately see results" tend to think of civic engagement as "results driven activity" that do not challenge institutions in power. They are eager to feed the hungry but not to think about the causes of poverty or injustice; they tutor inner city children, but do not ask why the schools have little in the way of resources. She concludes that her students learned a great deal about how to serve but little about effecting political change (Walker, 2000).

Thus, while Madison County Youth in Public Service, and other similar programs, may foster internal political efficacy and may well be an effective way to lever enthusiasm for engagement, it also appears to diminish or obscure both the importance of politics and the need to think about the impact and design of social institutions and structures.[6] Since the pursuit of a more just and equitable society requires more than individual efforts to "make a difference" – since politics and attention to the design and impact of social structures are also essential – those designing curriculum must find ways to maintain and promote students' sense of internal efficacy while also attending to the importance of politics and analysis of social institutions.

[6] We also suspect that an emphasis on experiencing efficacy can sometimes lead to a focus on doing rather than thinking. Specifically, since careful analysis takes time away from action and since such analysis often highlights potential shortcomings of efforts that, on the surface, appear desirable, a commitment to efficacy may lead some educators to downplay analysis. This outcome is not inevitable, however. The programs we studied all emphasized academic and analytical work related to students' experiences.

Curricular Possibilities

Faced with this tension, what might educators do? In particular, how might good programs promote commitments to both politics and participation? Given the importance of experiences that promote internal forms of efficacy, how might these be promoted without obscuring structural issues and attention to social justice?

Our study of these and other programs have helped us identify curricular strategies that may help educators respond to this challenge allowing programs to foster both students' sense of internal efficacy and their commitment to engagement while simultaneously recognizing and analyzing broader structural dynamics that may constrain many efforts at societal improvement.

Small Successes – Bigger Agendas

Several programs we studied sought to carefully plan activities so that small successes were possible, with the understanding that they are part of something larger, perhaps less immediately attainable. Like Madison County Youth in Public Service, these programs offered students successful experiences and minimized difficult implementation snafus by careful attention to small, achievable, intermediary tasks. Unlike their Madison County peers, however, teachers in these programs connected small projects substantively with broader explorations into root causes of social problems and accompanying political struggles. Like Bayside Students for Justice, these programs sought to equip students with the analytical and critical thinking skills needed to address structural obstacles to change.

In one program, for example, students from a private high school who were enrolled in an advanced Spanish language class were brought together with adults in a nearby Hispanic community who were studying for their United States citizenship exam. The students had

opportunities for intensive Spanish speaking as they examined their own and others' ideas about citizenship and the value of democratic participation. They also gained direct experience with the Hispanic immigrant community and a sense of accomplishment from their work in that community. As one student noted, "What I like best about the class is really working hands-on with someone else and also being able to use Spanish in a real life situation."

From the standpoint of implementation, this Spanish language program was successful. But the lessons did more than provide efficacious opportunities through tutoring and related opportunities to reflect in class on the people they met. While such experiences, like those of their Madison County peers, might have spurred greater commitment to future voluntary acts, had the curriculum ended with tutoring, tutoring would have been framed as an "answer" to the challenges these recent immigrants face.

To highlight the kind of deeper analysis of social, political, and economic issues that the leaders of Bayside aimed for, the teachers of this course arranged for students to tour the community and to study the social, political, and economic conditions of the local town, and of other Hispanic communities in the United States and in Latin America. Through this work, students gained an increased awareness of underlying political concerns. Students, spoke (in Spanish), for example, about the high incidence of lead paint in houses in this community, about cycles of poverty, and about inadequate public services. After reading articles on poverty and housing conditions in this town, several students questioned how the state legislature could be considering lowering taxes when such poverty exist. When asked about the curriculum, students often demonstrated a new awareness of these underlying, broader challenges. Statements like the one that follows were typical:

> Learning first-hand about some of the experiences of the immigrants here in [our town] reflects on other places like Washington Heights in New York where there is a huge Dominican population; And not just Hispanics, because all immigrants share some similar experiences…They face the same kinds of problems finding jobs and facing racism.

This student went on to highlight the importance of addressing these deeper social ills. In short, this program, while giving students a strong sense of success in preparing adults for the citizenship exam, also required that they examine broader social, political, and economic dynamics in relation to the lives of the immigrants they met. In doing so, they linked individual relationships and actions to policy issues and analysis of social structures.

While students may have felt no more optimistic about their potential to change policies affecting immigrants than the students who participated in the Bayside program, the sense of despair that characterized many Bayside interviews was notably absent in the statements made by those who were part of this citizenship project. In the parlance of the 1980s Nuclear Freeze Movement, their projects were "small enough to appear doable but big enough to be inspiring."[7]

Interestingly, the second year of the Bayside program adopted a related approach. The class decided to focus on violence and to study this issue from a structural perspective. Rather than doing a service project, the students took part in a retreat and focused on personal transformation and the role that violence plays in their lives and in the lives of fellow community members. These discussions were coupled with discussions of broader social dynamics that might promote violence in the society. While it was clearly difficult for students to talk honestly and openly about their behavior and about the ways in which violence had affected their lives, the experience left students energized rather than depleted. Survey results indicated growth in

some conventional measures of civic capacities and commitments as well as in student interest in political engagement and ability to discuss root causes of social problems (see Westheimer and Kahne, 2002).

Similarly, it is important to note that the successful strategy employed in Madison County – placing students in efficacious organizations and having them join others in meaningful work – can be structured to emphasize themes of social justice while minimizing the potential sense of frustration and alienation that can occur when students work on their own on often intractable social problems. A clear and powerful example of this approach is provided in James Youniss and Miranda Yates (1997) study of mostly African-American students enrolled in a Washington D.C. Catholic school. These students worked in soup kitchens and their accompanying classroom analyses of poverty and homelessness provided them not necessarily with a sense of complete success – but rather a vision of an ideal for which they and others could collectively strive. Frustration did not take hold of these students despite the fact that homelessness was not eliminated. Students became engaged in thinking about these issues and began to be able to see themselves as effective political participants.

There are other strategies programs might use to carry students' sense of hope and possibility through difficult and broader political projects. The Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, for example, seeks to engage students in a supportive community that can motivate and affirm the importance of challenging political structures and working for systemic change even when – or especially because – participants encounter strong resistance from governmental and other social institutions. Indeed, other studies have suggested that social bonds, a sense of affiliation, and support from a community of students and others who share commitments can nurture and sustain civic involvement despite intimidating challenges and frustrating experiences

[7] This phrase appeared on a popular Nuclear Freeze Movement bumper sticker.

(McAdam, 1988; Youniss, McLellan, and Yates, 1997). Similarly, a Kentucky program at Berea College called The Overground Railroad took participants on visits of historic landmarks in the civil rights movement and introduced them to individuals who helped make the civil rights movement happen. These individuals who were active in the movement and who in some cases are still active in social change efforts today – individuals who stayed true to their convictions despite the challenges of their work – seemed to inspire students and buttress their sense of hope and civic commitments. They offered a compelling vision of a meaningful life and of the potential efficacy of collective social action.[8]

Rethinking the Goal of Efficacy

Conclusion

Young people today have few opportunities to recognize their potential contributions to civic and political life. The Madison County Youth in Public Service program highlights the substantial impact that experiences of success can provide. By integrating government curriculum with meaningful work in the public sector, students' civic commitments and capacities expanded significantly. Many similar programs seek to engage students in successful community work so that they might develop a sense of efficacy in relation to their participation in community efforts. Certainly providing positive experiences that develop young people's sense that they can make a difference in their community is a worthwhile educational project. But this is not the complete story.

The impact of the frustration Bayside Students For Justice experienced is also worthy of careful attention. While the experiences of students at Bayside demonstrates that exposure to some authentic community dynamics can diminish students' sense of internal efficacy and in the

[8] A detailed discussion of these and other strategies programs employ to effectively promote active democratic

process limit their commitment to future civic or political involvement, other indicators demonstrate the value of engaging students in analysis of significant and difficult-to-solve social problems. Part of the frustration Bayside students experienced resulted from real world barriers to change. Students appear to report low external efficacy because, in fact, external factors were barriers to change. We are reluctant to reject the value of these authentic experiences even though they appeared to diminish students' internal efficacy as well as their motivation for active involvement in civic action. Our study indicates that structuring curriculum to avoid real world barriers may obscure important social forces and thus be mis-educative.

At the same time, authenticity alone – to the extent that it conveys a sense of hopelessness – is not desirable. The Bayside curriculum aimed to promote commitments to active civic engagement. The democratic promise of such curriculum is not fulfilled if students "learn" that civic engagement is pointless.

Numerous societal norms and incentives will lead teachers and students to focus on civic activities that avoid major social problems and analysis of root causes of injustice and inequality. Such service activities are less controversial, easier to fund, and enjoy widespread public support. They also provide opportunities for promoting internal efficacy. These activities, however, may not provide sufficient preparation for the often contentious and difficult challenge of working to understand and change the social, economic, and political dynamics that surround complex issues such as poverty, caring for the environment, or racism. If teachers and students decide that such problems are hopeless or, alternatively, that it is easier to pursue a vision of citizenship that avoids conflict, the full promise of democracy will not be realized.

Democracy achieves its potential when citizens are both capable of and committed to working to improve society, and schools have an important role to play in preparing students

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citizenship can be found in Kahne and Westheimer, forthcoming.

accordingly. Avoiding projects that focus on difficult to solve structural issues in an effort to foster efficacy can result in missed opportunities for democratic social change. Doing so can advance a politically conservative understanding of civic responsibilities – one that sees direct service and individual acts of kindness and charity rather than efforts to examine and address root causes of problems as the primary engine for social improvement.

Educating citizens for a democratic society requires that students gain both a sense that they can "make a difference" and also the ability to analyze and challenge social and institutional practices as they work to create a more just society.

Table 1. Madison County Youth In Public Service

FACTORS (Chronbach's Alpha pre, post)	SAMPLE	CHANGE	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST	Significance Level	Number of Students
PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY TO HELP OTHERS (.62, .74)	Intervention	.21*	4.00	4.21	.01	61
	Control	-.06	3.99	3.92	.63	37
COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (.54, .71)	Intervention	.19^	4.27	4.46	.06	61
	Control	-.10	3.89	3.99	.54	37
DESIRE TO WORK FOR JUSTICE (.65, .73)	Intervention	.07	3.07	3.14	.31	61
	Control	.03	2.84	2.88	.81	37
I WILL VOLUNTEER (.80, .86)	Intervention	.10	3.59	3.70	.14	61
	Control	-.09	3.28	3.18	.43	37
FOLLOW THE NEWS (.43, .41)	Intervention	.24**	3.35	3.59	.00	60
	Control	-.12	3.22	3.10	.27	37
INTEREST IN POLITICS (.81, .81)	Intervention	.03	3.41	3.44	.55	61
	Control	-.05	2.76	2.71	.63	37
CIVIC EFFICACY (.66, .71)	Intervention	.34**	3.78	4.12	.00	61
	Control	.10	3.38	3.48	.34	37
VISION (.65, .71)	Intervention	.30*	2.65	2.95	.01	61
	Control	.12	2.63	2.75	.35	37
KNOWLEDGE/SOCIAL CAPITAL FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (.67, .72)	Intervention	.94**	3.95	4.89	.00	60
	Control	-.23	3.13	2.90	.25	37
LEADERSHIP EFFICACY (.78, .81)	Intervention	.31**	3.60	3.91	.00	61
	Control	.03	3.57	3.60	.72	37

^p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01

Table 2: Bayside Students for Justice

FACTORS (Chronbach's pre, post)	CHANGE	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST	Significance Level	Number of Students
PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY TO HELP OTHERS(.62, .74)	-.41**	4.17	3.76	.00	54
COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (.54, .71)	-.23^	3.98	3.75	.10	54
DESIRE TO WORK FOR JUSTICE (.65, .73)	-.14^	3.05	2.91	.10	55
I WILL VOLUNTEER (.80, .86)	-.10	3.27	3.17	.26	54
FOLLOW THE NEWS (.43, .41)	.01	3.13	3.14	.95	51
INTEREST IN POLITICS (.81, .81)	.08	2.97	3.04	.31	61
CIVIC EFFICACY (.66, .71)	.12	3.24	3.35	.29	55
VISION (.65, .71)	-.09	2.81	2.72	.39	55
KNOWLEDGE/SOCIAL CAPITAL FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (.67, .72)	.03	2.87	2.89	.81	52
LEADERSHIP EFFICACY (.78, .81)	-.21*	3.31	3.10	.03	55

^ p<.10, * p<.05, ** p<.01

Table 3: Notable Individual Item Scores in "Interest in Politics" Scale for Bayside

FACTORS/Items	CHANGE	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST	Significance Level
INTEREST IN POLITICS	.08	2.97	3.04	.31
I enjoy talking about politics and political issues	+1.00**	3.16	4.16	.00
I expect that I will vote in every election	-.38*	3.79	3.40	.03
In the next three years I expect to work on at least one political campaign	-.31*	2.77	2.46	.04

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